

U-2 Pilot Blames Mystery Blast

Flier Explains 'Destruct' Device And Poison Needle

By John G. Norris
Staff Reporter

Francis Gary Powers told a public Senate hearing yesterday how his U-2 plane was brought down from the skies high over Russia 22 months ago by a mysterious, orange-colored explosion.

In calm, self-possessed tones, the Central Intelligence Agency pilot described his ill-fated flight and subsequent interrogation, trial and imprisonment

Partial text of Francis Gary Powers' testimony at Senate hearing. Page A10.
Summary of results of CIA interrogation of Powers. Page A11.

Restrained questioning of U-2 pilot Powers leaves many puzzles of flight unanswered. Page A12.

as a spy before a packed session of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Earlier, a CIA report was issued saying he lived up to his obligations, and many Senators praised the way he had conducted himself throughout his ordeal.

There was a burst of applause from the spectators, when the Virginia-born former Air Force captain declared

"There was one thing that I always remembered while I was there and that was that I was an American."

For 90 minutes, Powers told the story of his flight—the first time publicly since his release and return to this country nearly a month ago—and then answered ques-

tions. Powers cast little new light on what brought down his high-flying plane. He told of "feeling, hearing and just

sensing" an explosion, with "just a slight acceleration of the aircraft" felt in the plane itself.

"I immediately looked up from the instruments and everywhere I looked was orange," he added.

Powers used a model of the U-2 to show how the plane went out of control and then into a spin.

He said his first reaction was to reach for the "destruct" switches, but then felt he'd better see if he could get out first, as the explosives were timed to go off 70 seconds after pulling the switches.

The dark-haired pilot said he couldn't use the ejection because he was being thrown forward and his legs were caught under the windshield. They would have been cut off if he had ejected, he said.

So he opened the canopy and loosened his seat belt, and was immediately thrown half way out of the cockpit, held back only by oxygen hoses. Gravity forces then prevented him from reaching the "destruct" switches and finally he pulled the hoses loose and left the plane.

The official CIA report left it unclear what the destruct charge was to blow up—the plane or merely an advanced-type camera and other secret equipment—and the Senators did not clarify this point. But a House Armed Services Committee source said that it was merely to destroy the secret equipment.

Suspect Near Miss

Chairman Carl Vinson (D-Ga.) of the House Armed Services Committee also told newsmen that CIA experts believe that Powers' U-2 was brought down by a near miss from a ground-to-air rocket.

Other factors seem consistent with this. Powers told of seeing another parachute in the sky as he came down near Sverdlovsk in the Soviet Union. He thought at the time, he said, that it might be attached to the first stage of an anti-aircraft rocket.

At the time the U-2 was brought down, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev declared

that it was destroyed by a new high-altitude anti-aircraft rocket. Some experts in the United States discounted this then.

Powers at the hearing did not give the altitude at which he was flying when he felt the blast, but afterward he told questioning newsmen it was at 68,000 feet.

The Pound, Va., flier said he saw no sign of enemy planes in the sky at the time, although, much earlier he sighted the contrails of a plane, paralleling his course, far below him.

The pilot's testimony and the CIA report made it plain that he had followed his instructions as to what to do if shot down and captured. It was made very clear that he was not instructed to kill himself with a poison needle given him just before takeoff.

"Someone" gave him the needle hidden in a coin, just before taking off, he said, to use if he wanted to if captured and subjected to torture. Powers and the CIA said that it was optional whether he took it along and also whether he used it.

Tore Up His Map

On the way down by parachute, Powers told the Senators he tore up a map in small pieces, and debated what to do about the needle. He went on:

"I got to thinking that when I got on the ground if I were captured they would surely find this coin but maybe with just the pin lying loose in the pocket it would be overlooked. So I opened up the coin, got the pin out and just dropped it in my pocket."

It wasn't until the third search he was given after capture that the needle was found, he said. And he never would have needed it, as things turned out, for he never was subjected to torture, or indeed threats other than frequent reminders that he could be sentenced to death for the offense for which he was tried.

Lists Instructions

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Richard B. Russell (D-Ga.) questioned Powers about his instructions and guidance of what to do if

captured. The instructions to U-2 pilots, said Powers, were as follows:

"If evasion is not feasible and capture appears imminent, pilots should surrender without resistance and adopt a co-operative attitude toward their captors.

"Pilots will be instructed that they are perfectly free to tell the full truth about their mission with the exception of certain specifications of the aircraft. They will be advised to represent themselves as civilians, to admit previous Air Force affiliation, to admit current CIA employment and to make no attempt to deny the nature of their mission."

When first questioned by the Russians, Powers said, he first tried to tell a cover story about losing his way outside the Soviet Union and wandering over the middle of the country. But his interrogators confronted him with maps of the U.S.S.R. Russian rubles, and other evidence taken from the partially destroyed U-2 which made further evasion futile.

Thereafter, he told what he had been authorized to tell and refused to give evidence of other things such as the names of other U-2 pilots, Powers said.

Russell asked him about his testimony at his trial that he had made a terrible mistake in flying over Russia, his apology to the Russian people and his statement that he never would do it again.

Powers replied that this statement was made on advice of his Russian counsel and it "was easy to say."

"It was easy to say," he went on. "Because what I meant by saying that and what I wanted them to think I meant was quite different.

"My main sorrow was that the mission had failed and I was sorry that I was there and it was causing a lot of adverse publicity to the States."

Expected Worse Treatment

Under questioning, Powers said he was surprised at the treatment he received at the hands of the Russians, having expected it to be worse.

"I rather think you got off somewhat better than a Russian would in this country